

MANAGERS IDLE AS SUMMER PUTS IN APPEARANCE

Eight Frisky "Ponies"
of the "Step This Way"
Ballet - Shubert.

Kitty Gordon
World Films
Globe

STAGE WHISPERS

By GEORGE S. KAUFMAN.

THE FINAL week of June finds the vitality of the theatre at its lowest. The last of the "summer shows" has arrived, and it is too early to do more than think about the plans for next season. In New York at present the theatre is being carried along by its own inertia. For the first time in many a month not even a single prospective production dots the horizon, and meanwhile the list of attractions continues to shrink. The Washington Square Players ended their season at the Comedy last night, and "Justice," the last remaining dramatic offering, will remain but one more week at the Candler.

A few comedies and musical shows will continue, half a dozen of each, or thereabouts. The first real hot weather will exert its customary eliminating influence, however, and the second week of July will find not more than eight or ten theatres housing \$2 attractions. It must be admitted that a summer season which promised much now bids fair to be merely another summer season. The manager who has a success on his hands is very rocky about it in April—he invariably sees an all-summer run for it. But the one great fact remains that New York does not care a great deal about the theatre in the summer, and perhaps it is just as well.

A couple of weeks, however, and the season of 1916-17 will be born. Here and there a manager is already putting forth a tentative hand in the shape of a "spring tryout," indeed, no less than five of these tryouts took place within commuting distance of New York last Monday. At least two or three of the quintet are certain to arouse managerial ambitions, and even before July departs one or more of them will slip into town. And then the deluge.

Whatever the vagaries of the drama, however, the persistent films are ever with us. At present they are more with us than ever, for it is evident that they are approaching a turning point. They are about to undergo The Uplift. Quite a number of producers have simultaneously discovered that the present photoplays are largely junk and there is being quite a to-do made about the discovery. Of course, nobody is going to be vastly deceived by this sudden fuss. It is not only during the last few months that the films have been piffle, and it is not only during the last few months that the producers have known it.

There is no desire to discredit the sincerity of the firms that are about to tempt the better writers by offering better rewards. They should have praise and encouragement. But film producers are people, say what you will, and their business is the making of films. Their willingness to pay more money for scenarios has not been brought about by any sudden realization on their part of the poor quality of the product. They have known they must have known about that poor quality for years. It is the increasing wisdom of the film-going public that is responsible for the proposed change.

Of course, the mere fact that this

film men are ready to pay big money for good scenarios does not mean that they will get good scenarios. It is more than possible that they will conscientiously pay big sums to good writers and get only junk in return. The fact that a man is a high-priced novelist does not necessarily mean that he will be a good scenario writer. A sterling example is Rupert Hughes, who received a lot of money for writing "Gloria's Romance." From what we have seen of that picture, any conductor on the Twenty-ninth Street cross-town line could turn out a better one between Madison Avenue and Broadway. The films need more than novelists. They need dramatists.

And not only that. Having acquired dramatists, the film men must have sense enough to leave them alone. They must take away from their directors the power to mutilate at will. A great American dramatist—one of the greatest—American dramatists—told us a few weeks ago about his attempt to write for the films. He took a scenario to a certain star—an actress whose standing is such that she is privileged to select her own vehicles. She read the scenario and liked it. She offered the author \$500 for it.

"Make it three hundred," was his reply. "Make it one hundred, or fifty or twenty-five, or ten. I don't care. In fact, I'll make you a present of it. But on one condition. It must be produced exactly as I have written it. I refuse to allow it to percolate through any director."

And the scenario was refused. Jesse L. Lasky, in an article in The Tribune a few weeks ago, talked the whole thing over and laid the blame on the scenario writers. He now comes to the fore with a plan to relieve the situation—the first definite plan, so far as we know. Briefly, Mr. Lasky expects to obtain scenario writers by developing them. To this end he has brought Hector Turnbull back from the Pacific Coast as instructor-in-chief. There is no one better fitted for this job than Hector. He has been in Los Angeles something more than a year, and in that time he has run the motion picture gamut. He has written scenarios varying all the way from excellent to awful.

But give ear to Mr. Lasky:

First, we guarantee that all material submitted will get quick consideration, and if it is not acceptable we will return it to the author with a carefully written, constructive criticism, in which we will endeavor to point out the reasons why the story, in our humble opinion, was not worth purchasing. If, on the other hand, the story contains an idea, or even a situation, worth developing, we agree to collaborate with the author and to lend all his time to the encouragement and assisting of other writers. We intend to appeal to men at the top of their profession, who in the past would not take the trouble to study new art with care. We want to cooperate with the man who writes good stories or who has not yet established their names in the

literary field; in fact, we ask every writer, experienced and otherwise, to get in touch with our department. We are willing and ready to pay well for ideas submitted in ordinary synopsis form, and through trained continuity writers, many of them formerly successful dramatists, we will take these stories and, preserving all their dramatic qualities, construct them into the final complete scenarios.

Pictures to-day have a better circulation than any magazine or periodical ever published. Are we not then entitled to the works of the greatest authors and dramatists of our times? We think we are, and we are prepared to compete with the best periodicals and publishing houses, to pay such prices as all things being equal will win the author over to the motion picture drama. Having won him, we promise a sympathetically produced photo drama, preserving all the elements of the author's story and giving him full credit for the same.

Well, Mr. Lasky, here are our best wishes for success in the venture. And take heed yourself.

Somehow we don't feel so unkindly disposed toward the films as we have at various times in the past. They have taken Eva Tanguay away from the regular stage.

Broadway is many a mile from the Rio Grande, and it is unlikely that a Mexican war (it may be "the" Mexican war by the time this is read) will have any effect on our theatres. At the most, we may have a patriotic drama or two. We don't think much of patriotic dramas, but that fact is not likely to keep managers from producing them. A Mexican affair called "Peace and Quiet" was staged in Washington last week, and George Scarborough went to the border a few months ago with the avowed intention of obtaining color for a masterpiece. Well, let them come. A city that accepted "The White Feather" is unlikely to quail before any war plays that may be in store for it.

As to war and the theatre, a London theatrical weekly thus sums up the situation in Paris:

"Theatres? 'Theatres in Paris are doing quite well, are they not?' people often ask me. Yes, they're doing quite well if you compare them with the months when they did 'chug at all,' but the real figures of gross takings in the Paris theatres speak more clearly than any journalist about the situation. I was at a big music hall the other evening and it was full. But the most expensive orchestra stall cost half a crown instead of 8 shillings, and only a row or two were sold at this price, while at the matinee seats were sold for twopenny each, and you sat where you liked. The one theatre which has done best during the war is the Opéra Comique. There they make nearly £200 at Sunday matinees with popular operas like 'Carmen,' and usually £100 or more on the good evenings. But these subsidized theatres don't open every day. The gross receipts of other theatres in Paris are rather startling to a Londoner. Every Londoner knows the little Théâtre des Capucines, an expensive little house, with bright proscenium and clever artists. The gross receipts for Friday evening, Saturday evening and Sunday evening of last week (the three best evenings of the week these, at any Paris theatre) amount to an average of \$75 francs, or not quite £15 per evening. No theatre in Paris except the subsidized ones are taking an average of £80 a night gross, and even the big music hall like the Folies Bergères and Margery rarely touch £20 receipts for one performance.

Conditions in London are not so desperate, of course, although the shortage of actors is naturally unabated. Juveniles are being played by old men, for the audiences resent the engagement of young Americans for the parts. The London stage, of course, is making no progress; the managers are merely making time by making productions of a tried and true nature. Thus there is a good market for American successes.

Mr. Sheldon's "Romance" continues, but—oh, sad the day!—"The Boomerang" has failed. Can it be due to the difference between a Butt and a Belasco?

There is an opening in this town for an ambitious manager who will produce a series of annual satirical musical revues. Revues that will poke fun at matters in general, we mean, and do it cleanly and cleverly. Mr. Cohan's revues are perfect in their line, but they concern themselves only with the stage. There was a time when Mr. Ziegfeld's "Follies" filled the bill, at least partly, but the coming of Joseph Urban has evidently caused the manager to forget everything except the necessity of catering to the eye.

We have been to every musical production of the year, and not one of them has concerned itself even momentarily with the many sides of the varying Mexican situation, with the countless angles of our national politics, with any one of a hundred fruitful and waiting subjects. Indeed, satire has come previously close to vanishing from the stage. What could not a Gilbert do with the vacillating Mr. Wilson!

The man who has come closest to this ideal during the past year is not a playwright at all. He is a cowboy, and his name is Will Rogers. His nightly talk at the Midnight Frolic is never twice the same, and it is invariably punctuated with bright comment on the news of the day. Somebody who wants a good musical show could do a great deal worse than engage Mr. Rogers to write it. Indeed, many HAVE done worse.

"Cooked by Lee Wung Ho, Late Chef of the Emperor of China," reads a line on the Frolic menu. Let's see—where is the Emperor of China?

The electric in front of the Empire Theatre announces that "Sybil" will reopen at that house for a brief run late in the summer, and when that happens another of New York's distinctive playhouses will lose some of its distinction. For there never has

LUCILLE CAVANAGH.



Miss Cavanagh, who entered vaudeville via the "Follies," will begin her second week at the Palace to-morrow.

SHADOWS ON THE SCREENS

PAULINE FREDERICK, in a screen version of E. Phillips Oppenheim's novel, "The World's Great Snare," will be the feature at the Strand this week. The Oppenheim story is not of diplomats, detectives and dress suits, as one would expect, but relates the story of a dancer in a miners' café, in the days of the wild West and gold fever. A Max Figman comedy entitled "Microbes" is also featured.

"Flirting with Fate" is the engaging title of the latest Douglas Fairbanks offering, which will be shown at the Rialto this week.

In addition to Hugo Riesenfeld's excellent orchestra, M. De Frere, of the Chicago Opera Company, and Arthur Aldridge, late of the Hippodrome, will give solo selections.

been a musical production on the stage of the Empire, it having been Charles Frohman's idea that the Empire should hold itself a bit aloof. New York, despite its huge number of theatres, has few that adhere to a set policy.

The powers behind "Civilization" are not without their occasional bursts of caution. Whereas the early announcements proclaimed Mr. Ince's masterpiece "the picture that will stop the war," it is to be noted that the later eight-sheets have substituted "should" for "will."

The theatrical game is commonly believed to be considerable of a gamble, but there is one manager who doesn't think so. At all events, he has deliberately doubled his risk in the case of one of his productions. Having faith in the play, he offered the author \$20,000 cash in lieu of royalties. The author refused, but agreed to part with fifty per cent of his interests for \$10,000. So the money was paid. The play, incidentally, has not yet come to town, so there is as yet no means of knowing which of the contracting parties was the wise man.

The requisites of theatrical management are shifting. The first thing that the present day producer looks around for is a good auctioneer.

Broadway's newest theatre is to be called the Apollo. Why not the Bijou Dream?

Ann Pennington, who can be seen in person in Mr. Ziegfeld's "Follies," will make her screen debut at the Broadway in "Susie Snowflakes," another Famous Players-Paramount release. Whether Miss Pennington is anywhere near so accomplished an actress as she is a dancer will be discovered upon viewing her initial screen effort.

Bertha Kalish, in "Ambition," the tale of a man who seeks political office by means of the charms of his wife, will be William Fox's contribution to the literature of the film this week. The picture will be shown the first four days at the Academy Music.

Beginning to-day, a weekly World film will be added to the programme at the Globe Theatre, where Billie Burke and "Gloria's Romance" is the main attraction. The eighth and ninth chapters of the serial will be on view this week.

The first World picture will be Kitty Gordon in "The Crucial Test," which will mark her third appearance on the screen. William A. Brady, who is going to save the film business or know the reason why, is the man behind the Gordon film.

The New York Roof, atop the New York and Criterion theatres, will remain open until 1 a. m. to give professional people and night workers an opportunity to see films. This is the only midnight movie performance in the country.

The features the coming week at both the theatre and roof will include Edith Storey, in "The Shop Girl," on Monday; Mae Marsh and Robert Harron, in "The Wild Girl of the Sierras," on Tuesday; "Shoes," with Mary MacLaren, on Wednesday; "A Matrimonial Martyr," with Ruth Roland, on Thursday; Virginia Pearson, in "Hypocriasy," on Friday; Kitty Gordon, in "The Crucial Test," on Saturday, and Viola Dana, in "The Flower of No Man's Land," on Sunday.

William A. Brady's scenario contest is announced as an enormous numerical success. In two weeks something like fifty thousand scenarios and synopses were received. Of the first 1,700 read, 852 were graded possible, 96 were graded extraordinary and only 23 unavailable. With ninety-six "extraordinary" scenarios on hand, great things may now be expected of the World Film Corporation.

Robert Warwick will presently be seen as Nathan Hale in a picturization of Clyde Fitch's play. The next production featuring Carlyle Blackwell and Muriel Ostriche will be "Sally in Our Alley."

"Civilization," Thomas Ince's very expensive spectacle film, continues its civilizing run at the Criterion.

"The Fall of a Nation," the joint effort of Thomas Dixon and Victor Herbert for preparedness, is still the attraction at the Liberty.

"On the Italian Battlefield," motion pictures of the Italian army in what actions they have been, are on view at Weber's Theatre.

"How Britain Prepared," calculated to teach a thing or three to the American public, remains at the Lyceum.

"Ramona" will be the attraction at the Standard Theatre next week.

"Public Opinion," featuring Blanche Sweet, and "The Kid," starring Marie Doro, are two forthcoming Lasky productions.



Where Plays Continue

DRAMA.

CANDLER....."Justice" (final week)

COMEDY AND FARCE.

MAXINE ELLIOTT... "A Lady's Name" (Marie Tempest)
HUDSON..... "The Cinderella Man"
BELASCO..... "The Boomerang" (except Saturdays)
ELTINGE..... "Fair and Warner"
HARRIS..... "Hit-the-Trail Holliday"

MUSICAL.

WINTER GARDEN..... "The Passing Show of 1916"
ASTOR..... "The Cohan Revue, 1916"
NEW AMSTERDAM..... "The Ziegfeld Follies"
SHUBERT..... "Step This Way" (Low Fields)
CASINO..... "Very Good Eddie"
LYRIC..... "Katinka"
CORT..... "Molly O"
NEW AMSTERDAM ROOF..... "The Midnight Frolic"

THE WEEK'S VAUDEVILLE

VAUDEVILLE, like the theatrical world at large, is marking time. The new programme at the Palace is full of things summery and replete with entertaining features, but there still is no hint concerning the opening date of the promised one-act stock company. Next week, perhaps.

Stella Mayhew and Billie Taylor will be present with "songs, stories and humor," as the announcement has it. Jack Wilson will return with his more or less impromptu act, again assisted by Lillian Boardman and Frank Hurst. Gertrude Vanderbilt and George Moore, experts in their line, will offer a dancing and singing number.

Dancing, in fact, will again be the feature of the programme. George White and Lucille Cavanagh, the emphatic hit of last week's bill, will be held over for a second week. Theodore Kosloff and co-workers will do their Russian dances for a fourth consecutive week. Others will be Mme. Childs-Ohrman, prima donna; Fred J. Ardath & Co., in "Hiram"; "The Edge of the World," a spectacular novelty, and Martinetti and Sylvester.

James C. Morton and Frank Moore will appear at the Colonial this week in new comedies. Douglas J. Wood has acquired a new sketch entitled "The Shoplifter." Clarke and Verdi, the Ital-

ian comedians; Mand Miller, eccentric comedienne; Ideal, woman diver; and Hancock and Brooks are other acts.

At the Royal Sophie Tucker will headline, assisted by the Creole Syncopated Band. Mercedes, the psychic eighth wonder of the world; Harry and Eva Puck, "Honor Thy Children," a sketch by Sam Shipman and Clara Lipman; the Calts Brothers and William and Margaret Cutty, of the famous Six Musical Cutts are also booked to appear.

Milt Collins the first half of the week, and Van and Schenck the latter half, together with other acts and pictures, will be given at the Prospect.

Dorothy Jordan, Walter C. Kelly, the Virginia Judge; and Bert Lamont's 12 Speed Mechanicians, in an automobile assembling contest, will be featured at the New Brighton.

Albertina Rasch, of the Russian ballet; Isabelle D'Armond and company, Bert Fitzgibbon and Paul, Levan and Dobbs are slated for Henderson's Music Hall, Coney Island.

Columbia Theatre.
"Hello, New York" continues to be the programme at the Columbia for the edification of Gotham's millions.